

Best Practices

Ethiopia: Progress Towards the Achievement of the Primary Education MDGs

Education makes people more receptive to change and innovation. It is an instrument used to produce skilled manpower which is the driving force behind any development endeavour.

The development of human resources has been recognized as one of the major challenges that are facing the developing countries in the process of achieving economic and social development. This problem can only be alleviated through improvements and expansion of education.

Due to the critical role of education in development, in almost every developing country, the state largely assumes the responsibility of providing education to its citizens.

In the context of the Ethiopian setting, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has inherited a national education system beset by various complex problems accumulated over the years under the past successive regimes. Ethiopia's modern education in the past did not take cognizance of the needs of the society and did not have clear vision. In addition, inadequate facilities, insufficient training of teachers, overcrowded classes, shortage of books and other teaching materials were some other major hurdles of the previous education systems.

In order to alleviate these problems and allow education to play its due role in the development endeavours of the country, a new Education and Training Policy was formulated in 1986 E.C. and has been under implementation for the past 13 years.

The new policy encompasses overall and specific objectives as well as implementation strategies for formal and non-formal education from the kindergarten to higher education.

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As regards to primary education it covers grades 1 - 8 and is of duration lasting for eight years. The age of students in primary education is in the range of 7 - 14 and schooling starts at seven in grade 1.

The major objective of primary education is to produce middle level professionals in various fields of vocation equipped with the basic knowledge and expertise that enable them to understand and utilize the outcomes of modern technologies. It has also the goal of ensuring that all the children of the relevant age cohort receive primary education by the year 2015.

In order to fulfill this major objective and achieve the set goal, various activities have been carried out during the last 15 years to expand and improve education and encouraging results have been registered in this respect.

The overall number of primary schools in the country in 1984 E.C. was 8,434 while that of students attending classes in these schools stood at 2,063,635.

During the last 15 years alone, an additional 11,000 primary schools were built and are now rendering service.

Although the primary school age population was estimated to be 14,753,159, the total enrollment both in the regular and evening programs was 12, 657,342 excluding the alternative basic education enrollment. As a result, the primary gross enrollment level has reached 85.8% for both sexes. (MoE, 1998 E.C./2005-06/ Educational Statistics).

To realize the goal of universalization of primary education by 2015, Alternative Basic Education Programm (ESPDII) has been prepared and implemented by the Government.

The objective of the program is to provide basic education through alternative modes of education delivery. Accordingly, some 6425

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alternative basic education centers have been established in various regional states.

The enrollment in the alternative basic education program in 1998 E.C. was 817,332 for both sexes. As a result, the alternative basic education gross enrollment rate at national level becomes 5.5% for both sexes. If we include alternative basic education to the 1998 E.C. regular and evening programs, the gross enrollment rate for primary education increases to 91.3% for both sexes bringing Ethiopia closer to achieving the primary education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

As part of efforts to achieve the Millennium Goals in relation to primary education, preparations have been finalized to enroll 1.8 million primary school age children at the start of the Ethiopian Millennium in 2000 E.C. and a task force that is responsible for the implementation of this plan has been established in every regional state at all levels of administrative echelons.

The commitment of the Ethiopian Government to the improvement and expansion of education could also be corroborated by its budgetary allocation. Educational spending has been steadily increasing.

According to available Education Statistics, the education expenditure which was Birr 2.17 billion in 1993 E.C. has increased to 4.66 billion in 1998 E.C. with a remarkable rise registered.

In order to successfully meet the primary education MDGs, these encouraging efforts on the part of the Government should be backed by the community at large as well as the international non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders.